United Nations E/CN.18/2013/6

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 January 2013

Original: English

United Nations Forum on Forests
Tenth session
Istanbul, Turkey, 8-19 April 2013
Item 6 of the provisional agenda*
Emerging issues

International arrangement on forests, the post-2015 United Nations development agenda and the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development: interconnections and implications

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with its multi-year programme of work for the period 2007-2015, the United Nations Forum on Forests may include in the agenda of any of its sessions emerging issues of global significance that are related to and/or have an impact on forests and sustainable forest management and which are urgent, unexpected and not already addressed in the agenda of the respective session. The emerging issues for the tenth session of the Forum were identified by the Bureau of the Forum at its tenth session, on the basis of two major considerations: (a) the need for substantive preparation to enable the Forum at its eleventh session, in 2015, to review the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests and to decide on its future; and (b) the implications and interconnections of the important ongoing intergovernmental processes relating to forests and the international arrangement on forests. Accordingly, the present report contains a brief description of the international arrangement on forests and recommendations regarding the related preparatory activities during the period between the tenth and eleventh sessions of the Forum. The report also provides an initial assessment of the implications of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 United Nations development agenda for the international arrangement on

* E/CN.18/2013/1.

13-22079 (E) 070213

Please recycle

forests. In addition, the report discusses the interconnections of these issues and makes recommendations to the Forum on how to integrate its views regarding issues related to forests into those processes and how to take advantage of the processes in preparation for its eleventh session. Finally, the report touches briefly on "natural capital" as a broad emerging issue. The report will be discussed under the agenda item "Emerging issues" during the tenth session of the Forum.

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work for the period 2007-2015, the United Nations Forum on Forests may include in the agenda of any of its sessions emerging issues of global significance that are related to and/or have an impact on forests and sustainable forest management and which are urgent, unexpected and not already addressed in the agenda of the respective session.

2. The year 2015 is the time when the Forum will, in accordance with its multi-year programme of work, review the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests and decide on its future. It is also the target year for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The international community has already begun preparing for the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. Furthermore, the outcome of the recent major intergovernmental process on sustainable development, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, has several important implications for international cooperation, including with respect to the international arrangement on forests.

3. At its eleventh session, the Forum will therefore review the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests and decide on its future, which will require a thorough understanding of the implications and interconnections of all the above-mentioned developments. If the Forum is to be able to make a sound decision on the future of the international arrangement on forests, the period between its tenth and eleventh sessions will be a highly appropriate time to consider these developments and carry out preparatory activities that will provide the Forum with necessary information and analyses with respect to the above-mentioned issues at its eleventh session. Accordingly, the present report is aimed at providing some initial ideas regarding the future international arrangement on forests and the related preparatory activities, taking into account the implications of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 United Nations development agenda for forests. The report also discusses the interconnections of these issues and makes recommendations to the Forum on how to integrate its views regarding issues related to forests into those processes and how to take advantage of the processes in preparation for its eleventh session, in 2015.

II. International arrangement on forests

4. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2000/35, laid the foundation for the international arrangement on forests and established the United Nations Forum on Forests as an intergovernmental body on forests within the United Nations. The Forum has the following principal functions:

(a) To promote the sustainable management of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment;

(b) To promote the implementation of internationally agreed actions on forests at the national, regional and global levels;

(c) To provide a coherent, transparent and participatory global framework for policy implementation, coordination and development;

(d) To provide a forum for continued policy development among Governments, international organizations and other interested parties to foster a

common understanding on sustainable forest management and to address forest-related issues and emerging areas of priority concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner;

(e) To enhance cooperation as well as policy and programme coordination on forest-related issues among relevant international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments, as well as contribute to synergies among them, including coordination among donors;

(f) To foster international cooperation, including North-South and public-private partnerships, as well as cross-sectoral cooperation at the national, regional and global levels;

(g) To monitor and assess progress at the national, regional and global levels through reporting by Governments, as well as by international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments, and on this basis consider future actions needed.

5. In 2006, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/49, strengthened the international arrangement on forests by agreeing on three additional principal functions for the Forum. Those functions are the following:

(a) To enhance the contribution of forests to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, in particular with respect to poverty eradication and environmental sustainability; and to the implementation of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, bearing in mind the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development;

(b) To encourage and assist countries to maintain and improve their forest resources with a view to enhancing the benefits of forests to meet present and future needs, in particular the needs of indigenous peoples and local communities whose livelihoods depend on forests;

(c) To strengthen interaction with relevant regional and subregional forest-related mechanisms, institutions and instruments, organizations and processes, to facilitate enhanced cooperation and effective implementation of sustainable forest management.

6. The Forum also established four shared global objectives on forests, which were enshrined in the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (hereinafter referred to as "the forest instrument"), adopted subsequently by the General Assembly in 2007, to attain the main objective of the international arrangement on forests and to enhance the contribution of forests to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, in particular with respect to poverty eradication and environmental sustainability. The Forum agreed to work globally and nationally to make progress towards their achievement by 2015.[1]

7. In 2015, according to its multi-year programme adopted in 2007, the overall theme of the eleventh session of the Forum will be "Forests: progress, challenges and the way forward for the international arrangement on forests". The Forum will convene a high-level segment to review the effectiveness of the international

[1] See Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/49.

arrangement on forests. The review will consider the following: a full range of options, including a legally binding instrument on all types of forests, strengthening of the current arrangement, continuation of the current arrangement and other options;[2] progress towards the achievement of the global objectives on forests and the implementation of the forest instrument and its four global objectives on forests;[3] and the contribution of forests to the internationally agreed development goals. Several issues can be considered for discussion under various components of the international arrangement on forests.

8. One important discussion concerns whether to adopt a legally binding instrument specifically on forests. If such an instrument were to be adopted, the following questions would arise: What would be its key objectives with respect to all types of forests and trees outside forests? What relationship would it have with the existing multilateral environmental conventions that are relevant to forests but not designed to specifically address them? Should it have a standing financial mechanism such as the Global Environment Facility, as is the case with other conventions, or should it have a separate global forest fund, or both? How should the instrument be implemented at the global, regional and national levels? Should there be one instrument to be implemented by all countries, or should there be an instrument with separate annexes/protocols for different regions in order to take their specificities into account? How should the provisions of the current forest instrument be used in the new instrument, and what will happen to the four global objectives on forests? Which organization or body should be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the new instrument? Where should the headquarters of the instrument be located, and how can the instrument be financially sustainable? All of these are among the issues that would have to be discussed in the context of a decision to adopt a legally binding instrument on forests.

9. Should countries agree to continue to strengthen the current international arrangement on forests rather than adopting a legally binding instrument, there are several issues that would have to be addressed. With regard to the forest instrument and the global objectives on forests, countries must find an effective and efficient solution that will permit the financing of forests. It is to be hoped that, by making a meaningful decision in this regard during its tenth session, to be held in Istanbul, Turkey, the Forum will make major progress in this area. Another key area for discussion will be how to strengthen the forest instrument in terms of both its implementation and its substance. Should it remain a global instrument, or should it have regional annexes? Should its implementation be supported by the strategic programmes of the international financial institutions, including the Global Environment Facility, in particular with regard to the preparation of national reports

[2] Ibid., para. 32.

[3] Global objective 1: reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation;
Global objective 2: enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people;
Global objective 3: increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests;
Global objective 4: reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management and mobilize significantly increased new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management.

for the sessions of the Forum? Should a subsidiary body be established under the auspices of the Forum to monitor its implementation more systematically and rigorously? Should a new timeline be agreed upon for the achievement of the global objectives on forests, or should those goals be realigned with the global development agenda beyond 2015?

10. There are also many issues that must be discussed in relation to the functions and working modalities of the Forum. In the light of the rapid developments and evolving mandates of the Forum, Member States may wish to consider additional functions for the Forum or to revise and update its current ones. They may also decide on new working modalities for the Forum, placing a greater focus on the advancement of forest policy development, coordination and implementation at the global, regional and national levels. In addition, the Forum may consider means and tools to enable the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to further support the work of the Forum, including by allocating specific resources to its members. How to strengthen the interrelationships among the Forum, regional organizations and processes and major groups is another area that the Forum may wish to discuss in 2015.

11. Thus, it is evident that reviewing the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests and deciding on its future will require substantial preparation. Such preparatory work must be done during the period between the tenth and eleventh sessions of the Forum, with the involvement of all Forum stakeholders. Furthermore, this work must be done taking into full account the ongoing developments in other major global processes, in particular the deliberations on the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. The preparations for the Forum's decision on the future of the international arrangement on forests should be broad, inclusive and focused and should include, inter alia, analytical studies, the holding of expert group meetings and the conduct of surveys. The results of those activities should be then provided to the Forum at its eleventh session through substantive inputs to the official documentation for the session, including the relevant reports of the Secretary-General.

III. Post-2015 United Nations development agenda

12. In 2000, world leaders set forth a shared vision for development based on the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility, in the form of the Millennium Declaration adopted by the General Assembly.[4] The Millennium Development Goals that followed have since provided milestones for global and national development efforts, with an overall target date of 2015.[5] The Goals are focused on a limited set of concrete and shared human development goals and targets: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS,

[4] Resolution 55/2, para. 6.

[5] See A/56/326, annex.

malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.[6]

13. The Millennium Development Goals framework helped to galvanize development efforts, set global and national priorities and focus action at all levels. The Goals provided a common worldwide agenda to address poverty and placed human progress at the forefront of the global development agenda. Important progress has been made in most countries, particularly towards the goals of eradicating poverty and improving access to primary education. Yet, trends have been uneven within and across countries and regions, and much more work remains to be done.

14. With the approach of 2015, which is the target date for the achievement of many of the Millennium Development Goals, it was imperative that the international community devise an inclusive process to define the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, taking into account emerging global challenges and issues and the experiences gained in implementing the Millennium Development Goals framework, including in terms of its strengths and weaknesses.

15. The purpose of a global development agenda is not to prescribe specific development strategies or policies, but to provide guidance for priority-setting at all levels (global, regional, national and subnational). To call it a "United Nations development agenda" is to express the readiness of the United Nations to serve as the multi-stakeholder platform for its formulation, with the capacity to undertake the broad-based consultations required and the ambition to produce a global development agenda that all countries and stakeholders will recognize as their own.[7]

16. In this connection, the Heads of State and Government participating in the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, held in September 2010 in New York, requested the Secretary-General to report annually on progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and to make recommendations in his annual reports, as appropriate, for further steps to advance the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.[8] Initial recommendations in this regard were presented in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals: options for sustained inclusive growth and issues for advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015" (A/67/257), with special reference to the need for an open and inclusive process of consultations on the agenda.

17. In the outcome document of the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Summit, the Heads of State and Government also requested the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session to organize a special event in 2013 to follow up on efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This could provide an opportunity to lay the foundations for consensus on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.

18. In his 2011 report on accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (A/66/126), the Secretary-General recommended an open and

[6] For a complete list of the Millennium Development Goals and their timelines, see http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/.

[7] See *Realizing the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General* (New York, 2012).

[8] Resolution 65/1, para. 81.

transparent consultation process to ensure that the post-2015 development agenda could have the best development impact. With this in mind, in September 2011 the Secretary-General established the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda to coordinate system-wide preparations for the agenda, in consultation with all stakeholders. The Task Team, launched in January 2012, brings together senior experts designated by the principals of more than 50 entities of the United Nations system and other international organizations. The terms of reference of the Task Team include: assessing ongoing efforts within the United Nations system; consulting external stakeholders, such as civil society, academia and the private sector; and defining a system-wide vision and road map on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. In addition, Member States have stressed that it is important that other intergovernmental processes, in particular the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, feed into discussions on the post-2015 agenda. They also share the view of the Secretary-General with regard to the need to work towards greater convergence of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and post-2015 processes in order to arrive at one post-2015 United Nations development agenda with sustainable development at its centre. Broad and inclusive consultation processes concerning the vision for the post-2015 agenda are ongoing and will be essential in shaping a shared vision.

19. The progress made within these processes and as a result of the multiple consultations that will take place at the national, regional and global levels will feed into the consultations on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, and eventually the high-level event to be held in September 2013. On the basis of the outcome of that special event, more focused discussions could be launched on the specific format and content of a new agenda, including possible goals and targets to be proposed for intergovernmental agreement.

IV. United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

20. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, and those participating in the Conference adopted a concrete outcome document entitled "The future we want" (resolution 66/288, annex). The participants reviewed the progress in the implementation of all sustainable development agreements adopted since the holding of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, addressed the related gaps and identified emerging issues. They also addressed two major themes: the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, and the institutional framework on sustainable development. "The future we want" contains numerous important provisions, including with respect to the green economy, sustainable development goals, a high-level political forum, sustainable development financing strategy options, facilitation mechanisms, sustainable consumption and production patterns, countries with special needs, and thematic issues.

Green economy

21. In addition, the participants in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development adopted guidelines on a green economy in the context of poverty

eradication and sustainable development.[9] Member States affirmed that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions. A green economy should contribute to the eradication of poverty, the promotion of sustained economic growth, the enhancement of social inclusion, the improvement of human welfare and the creation of opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth's ecosystems.

Sustainable development goals

22. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, countries recognized the importance and utility of a set of sustainable development goals[10] that are based on Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; fully respect all of the Rio Principles, taking into account the different national circumstances, capacities and priorities; are consistent with international law; build upon commitments already made; and contribute to the full implementation of the outcomes of all the major summits in the economic, social and environmental fields, including the outcome document of the Conference. These goals should be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.

23. The Conference participants also recognized that the goals should address and be focused on priority areas for the achievement of sustainable development, being guided by the outcome document. In addition, Governments decided to launch a process aimed at the development of a set of sustainable development goals that could build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the post-2015 development agenda.

High-level political forum

24. The Governments represented at the Conference decided to establish a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The high-level political forum[11] would follow up on the implementation of sustainable development and replace the Commission on Sustainable Development. Countries also identified several potential key functions for the forum, including a role in providing political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development; enhancing the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development at all levels; following up on and reviewing progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments contained in Agenda 21 and the outcomes of subsequent conferences and summits on sustainable development; encouraging the high-level system-wide participation of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in its work; improving cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system on sustainable development programmes and policies; enhancing the consultative role and participation of major groups; strengthening the science-policy interface; and strengthening ongoing capacity-building for data collection and analysis in developing countries.

[9] Resolution 66/288, annex, paras. 56-74.
[10] Ibid., paras. 245-251.
[11] Ibid., paras. 84-86.

Sustainable development financing strategy

25. Also at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Member States recognized the need for significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources and the effective use of financing, in order to give strong support to developing countries in their efforts to promote sustainable development, including through actions undertaken in accordance with the Conference outcome and for achieving sustainable development goals. They agreed to establish an intergovernmental process under the auspices of the General Assembly, with technical support from the United Nations system and in open and broad consultation with relevant international and regional financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders. The process would assess financing needs, consider the effectiveness, consistency and synergies of existing instruments and frameworks, and evaluate additional initiatives, with a view to preparing a report proposing options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives. An intergovernmental committee would implement this process and conclude its work by 2014.[12]

Technology and capacity-building

26. Governments represented at the Conference requested relevant United Nations agencies to identify options for a facilitation mechanism that promoted the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies by, inter alia, assessing the technology needs of developing countries, options to address those needs and capacity-building. They requested the Secretary-General, on the basis of the options identified and taking into account existing models, to make recommendations regarding the facilitation mechanism to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.[13]

Sustainable consumption and production patterns

27. In addition, the Governments adopted a 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns (see A/CONF.216/5) and invited the General Assembly, at its sixty-seventh session, to designate a Member State body to take any necessary steps to fully operationalize the framework.[14]

Thematic areas

28. The Conference participants also took forward-looking decisions regarding a number of thematic areas, such as energy, food security, forests, oceans and cities. The paragraphs of the outcome document concerning forests are discussed below.

Discussions on natural capital

29. As forests are among the Earth's natural resources and the Forum's vision on forests has always called for the values and services of forests to be fully taken into account, it is important that the Forum be informed of another emerging issue that is attracting increased attention on the part of countries and international

[12] Ibid., paras. 255 and 256.
[13] Ibid., para. 273.
[14] Ibid., paras. 224-226.

organizations. In conjunction with the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, there was a discussion among a number of countries and international organizations and businesses on the issue of "natural capital accounting", a term for which there is no specific definition. Judging from the existing literature on this topic, "natural capital" includes resources such as minerals, energy and forest timber and presumably includes non-timber forest products, agricultural land, fisheries and water. It also includes ecosystems producing services that are often invisible to most people, such as air and water filtration, flood protection, carbon storage, pollination for crops and habitat for fisheries and wildlife. The landscape approach will clearly benefit the accounting process and decisions relating to natural capital. The key is not only to measure the total value of natural assets, but also to measure the distribution of benefits, how much goes to each stakeholder group and the dependence of each group, especially the poor, on natural capital. Natural capital is a critical asset, in particular for low-income countries, where it constitutes a significant share of total wealth. Natural capital accounting can provide detailed statistics for better management of the economy, and help to improve governmental decision-making and planning, on the basis of this information. Being aware of the total value of natural capital can help us to better address poverty issues. A major step towards achieving this vision was taken recently with the adoption by the United Nations Statistical Commission of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts. The System provides an internationally agreed method, on par with the current System of National Accounts, of accounting for material natural resources such as minerals, timber and fisheries. The challenge now is to build capacity in countries to implement the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts and to demonstrate its benefits for policymakers. Currently, there is a partnership among a number of Governments, United Nations programmes and bodies relevant to this issue.[15]

V. International arrangement on forests, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development: post-2015 United Nations development agenda and the outcome of the implications and interconnections

30. The period from 2013 to 2015 will shape the future of sustainable development issues, the development agenda of the United Nations and the direction taken by the international community beyond 2015 with regard to forests. The intergovernmental processes responsible for defining the sustainable development goals; the modalities of the high-level political forum; sustainable development financing options; and the formulation of a post-2015 United Nations development agenda will certainly affect the discussions that the Forum will hold on the international arrangement on forests at its eleventh session, in 2015. On the other hand, these major processes have provided significant opportunities for forests and the Forum to play a vital role in

[15] The WAVES (Wealth Accounting and the Valuation of Ecosystem Services) partnership includes the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Statistical Commission; the countries of Botswana, Colombia, Costa Rica, Madagascar and the Philippines, which are implementing programmes; and the financial or technical support of Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and several civil society organizations.

shaping and contributing to the future development agenda of the United Nations, with sustainable development at its core, for many years to come.

31. In order to take advantage of the opportunities that have been provided by these processes with respect to the international arrangement on forests and in devising a road map for intersessional preparatory activities aimed at enabling the Forum to take an informed decision in 2015 on the future of that arrangement, it is necessary to review in a substantive and holistic manner the implications of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 United Nations development agenda for forests. Such a consolidated and comprehensive assessment is extremely important to enable the Forum to place its decision on the future of the international arrangement on forests at the centre of the global agenda for the period beyond 2015.

32. This section of the present report is aimed at providing an initial analysis of the implications of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the key issues relating to the post-2015 United Nations development agenda for forests and other components of the international arrangement on forests. However, a comprehensive assessment of the implications of the above-mentioned processes on forests requires additional time and resources. Furthermore, such an assessment should be conducted in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders and during the period leading up to the eleventh session of the Forum. Owing to the magnitude and scope of the work involved, it is also important to emphasize the need for the allocation by Member States of the necessary resources to the Forum Trust Fund, including their support for the necessary human resources.

33. While forests were not specifically on the agenda of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, its outcome document includes several provisions concerning forests and their interlinkages with other sectoral and cross-sectoral issues relating to sustainable development, conceptual policy issues and frameworks relevant to forests and other components of the international arrangement on forests. These paragraphs can be grouped into five sets of provisions.

34. The first group comprises the paragraphs of the outcome document devoted specifically to forests (paras. 193, 194, 195 and 196). In those paragraphs, Member States highlighted the social, economic and environmental benefits of forests to people and the contributions of sustainable forest management to the themes and objectives of the Conference. They expressed support for cross-sectoral and cross-institutional policies promoting sustainable forest management and reaffirmed that the wide range of products and services that forests provide create opportunities to address many of the most pressing sustainable development challenges. They called for enhanced efforts to achieve the sustainable management of forests, reforestation, restoration and afforestation, and expressed support for all efforts that effectively slow, halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation, including promoting trade in legally harvested forest products. Member States noted the importance of such ongoing initiatives as reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.

35. Member States called for increased efforts to strengthen forest governance frameworks and means of implementation, in accordance with the forest instrument, in order to achieve sustainable forest management. They committed themselves to improving the livelihoods of people and communities by creating the conditions needed for the sustainable management of forests, including through the strengthening of cooperation arrangements in the areas of finance, trade, the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, capacity-building and governance, and by promoting secure land tenure, particularly decision-making and benefit-sharing, in accordance with national legislation and priorities.

36. In addition, Member States called for the urgent implementation of the forest instrument and the ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the ninth session of the Forum on the occasion of the launch of the International Year of Forests.

37. Member States recognized that the Forum, with its universal membership and comprehensive mandate, plays a vital role in addressing forest-related issues in a holistic and integrated manner and in promoting international policy coordination and cooperation in achieving sustainable forest management. They invited the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to continue its support to the Forum and encouraged stakeholders to remain actively engaged in the work of the Forum. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of integrating sustainable forest management objectives and practices into the mainstream of economic policy and decision-making, and to that end they committed to working through the governing bodies of member organizations of the Partnership to integrate, as appropriate, the sustainable management of all types of forests into their strategies and programmes.

38. In these paragraphs, the Conference participants also highlighted the significance of many components of the international arrangement on forests, namely, the forest instrument, the work of the Forum and the role of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, in supporting its work. The inclusion of specific paragraphs on forests in the outcome document of the Conference, which are derived mainly from the ministerial declaration of the ninth session of the Forum, adopted in February 2011, convey two key messages: first, that forests have a substantive role in addressing the most pressing sustainable development challenges; and second, that the inclusion of these paragraphs in a document globally agreed upon by the Heads of State and Government constitutes a strong recognition of the success of the international arrangement on forests, in particular the work accomplished by the Forum in carrying out its principal functions.

39. The second group of provisions comprises those paragraphs that refer explicitly to the forest, but in relation to other issues. These include paragraph 52, on engaging major groups and other stakeholders; paragraphs 111 and 114, on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture; and paragraph 210, on mountains, which recognizes that the fragile mountain ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of deforestation and forest degradation.

40. The third group of provisions is composed of those paragraphs that, while not referring explicitly to forests, refer to natural resources, and thus implicitly to forests. The substantive link between forests as natural resources and a green economy is also shown in the section on "green economy". Paragraph 60 states that "green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication will enhance our ability to manage natural resources sustainably". This paragraph

reflects the fact that the relationship between the sustainable management of natural resources and the green economy is inclusive of the connection between sustainable forest management and the green economy. Paragraph 61 brings in another important aspect, the relationship between unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and the issue of the regeneration of natural resources, which include forests. The interlinkages of forests, a green economy and sustainable consumption and production patterns are an area on which the Forum may wish to decide that further work or studies are needed in order to fully understand these important aspects of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.

41. The fourth group of provisions comprises those paragraphs that, while relating to the basic functions, mandates the ongoing work of the Forum, do not refer specifically to the Forum.

42. In paragraph 179, the Heads of State and Government called for a strengthening of United Nations system support to small island developing States in keeping with the multiple ongoing and emerging challenges faced by those States in achieving sustainable development. Paragraphs 183 and 184 contain similar requests for support for Africa. The Forum has begun to address these issues by working with these countries, as well as low-forest-cover and least developed countries, to address the challenges that they are facing with regard to forest financing.[16]

43. Paragraphs 255, 262 and 273 concern a sustainable development financing strategy, the importance of ensuring steady and predictable access for developing countries to adequate financing from all sources to promote sustainable development, and a facilitation mechanism, respectively.

44. Finance and capacity-building form part of the core mandates of the Forum, by virtue of the fact that they are related to its sessions. Important work has been done by the Forum over the past four years that could contribute significantly to the development of finance strategies and a facilitation mechanism. In particular, the outcome of the work of the facilitative process, along with the findings of the 2012 study on forest financing conducted by the Advisory Group on Finance of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, may provide valuable input to the facilitation mechanism and to the development of a sustainable development financing strategy. However, additional work should be included in the programme and budget of the Forum secretariat for the bienniums 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 to respond to the requests made in these paragraphs, with the resources and manpower needed to carry out substantive work in these areas.

45. The fifth group of provisions consists of those paragraphs that deal with sustainable development goals and a high-level political forum. Owing to their nature, these paragraphs have short- and long-term implications for the international arrangement on forests; they also address areas critical to the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.

46. A joint timetable for a decision on sustainable development goals, the post-2015 United Nations development agenda and the future international arrangement on forests may give rise to some debate regarding a possible sustainable development goal on forests. This is especially likely, as the target year for

[16] See E/CN.18/2013/11.

assessing the progress made towards achieving the four shared global objectives on forests is also 2015.[17]

47. Meanwhile, and in accordance with paragraph 249 of the outcome document, the sustainable development goals process needs to be coordinated and coherent with the process of considering the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. As mentioned above, the United Nations has already embarked on a process of planning for this agenda, having started its work with regard to what should be done after 2015, what steps need to be taken and what issues must be considered in the planning process. Forests are not currently a major component in the post-2015 discussions, although some forest-related targets are included in Millennium Development Goal 7, on environmental sustainability. This Goal, along with others, is being considered in the review and scrutiny processes, on the basis of which countries will decide on their future beyond 2015.

48. Environmental sustainability was included among the eight Millennium Development Goals. Although progress has been made in the achievement of some of the Goals, the achievement of Goal 7 and its relevant targets by 2015 is off track, according to a thematic paper on that topic prepared in 2010 by the Millennium Development Goals Task Force of the United Nations Development Group for the Millennium Development Goals Summit. There might be several reasons for lack of progress on Goal 7, including its limited scope, which addresses only one pillar of sustainable development; decisions on the part of countries to give priority to other Goals; and lack of resources and knowledge. The question is how to reverse this trend and how to address the root causes of this lack of progress, after 2015.

49. It is important to recall that sustainable development has been a mandate of the United Nations system since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, at which it was agreed that all three pillars of sustainable development, namely, environmental protection, economic development and social development, should be considered and advanced in a balanced and integrated manner. Thus, socioeconomic development need not be at the expense of the environmental degradation and vice versa. In addition, the Rio Principles affirmed the responsibility of ensuring that the decisions we make today do not undermine the well-being of future generations.

50. Accordingly, it is essential to demonstrate not only the significant social and economic benefits of environmental protection for the overall development of countries, but also its aggregate contributions to the achievement of their other priorities, in particular poverty eradication. It should be noted that the four targets under Goal 7 and their 10 related indicators address only a small subset of issues related to environmental sustainability, failing to address the economic and social pillars of sustainable development. Moreover, they do not address other important issues such as land degradation and desertification and the management of natural resources.

51. Challenges that must be addressed by countries in the formulation of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda include uniting environmental protection with economic development and social progress in order to reduce poverty; addressing narrow inequalities at all levels; addressing the root causes of environmental degradation, poverty eradication, social exclusion and development

[17] See Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/49.

gaps; and linking greater accountability on the part of all people to the realization of a sustainable future for all. This is precisely where the definition of sustainable development goals will be essential.

52. Therefore, in designing a post-2015 United Nations development agenda and defining sustainable development goals, there is a need to change the approach that treats environmental sustainability as a stand-alone goal that has little internal coherence with the socioeconomic pillars of sustainable development and very weak links, if any, to what science tells us about ecological limits and thresholds. What is needed is to take sustainable development in its three dimensions — social, economic and environmental — as the defining framework for ensuring human development and well-being in the long run. Such an approach would be in line with the Forum's vision on forests, in which forests provide a wide range of services that go beyond purely environmental services and touch upon the livelihoods of people, their future, their environment and their economic life.

53. There is another major challenge facing countries in negotiating sustainable development goals and designing the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Member States called for sustainable development goals to be action-oriented, concise, easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. The challenge is how to set such goals when every institution, organization and convention is seeking to have its own issue(s) captured as a sustainable development goal.

54. Possible priority areas for sustainable development goals, including forests, energy, water, land, biodiversity and ocean issues, are real challenges for countries. Therefore, how do we reconcile the huge number of priority areas for action with the criteria set by the Heads of State and Government at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, make sure that the new sustainable development goals do not have the same fate as Millennium Development Goal 7, and make the goals relevant to the future of the international arrangement on forests?

Inclusion of a cross-cutting sustainable development goal on natural resources and its integration into the post-2015 United Nations development agenda

55. Given the high degree of global interdependence, the establishment of collective goals and targets to be pursued by the world community will remain important. In doing so, however, a one-size-fits-all approach should be avoided. The needed flexibility should be ensured so that targets may be tailored to regional, national and subnational conditions and priorities. Such tailoring of development targets is most effectively and legitimately carried out through participatory processes. Moreover, and given the outstanding deficits, the post-2015 United Nations development agenda and the process of defining sustainable development goals should be focused on human development and poverty eradication as the ultimate objectives. However, they should also provide an efficient framework for action to respond to a number of challenges that have become more pressing, and not miss the opportunity to address the issue of means, without being prescriptive.

56. In order to devise an integrated, unified, efficient and feasible agenda for the international arrangement on forests, and a post-2015 United Nations development agenda that has sustainable development at its core, an approach must be taken that: (a) recognizes the interconnectedness of global challenges and clearly demonstrates the economic, social and environmental benefits of each action in an integrated and comprehensive manner; (b) recognizes the different levels of development among countries; (c) maintains the momentum in achieving poverty eradication; (d) addresses the cross-cutting impacts of conflicts, disasters and inequality on all goals; and (e) makes use of the cross-cutting, multifunctional role of natural resources for economic growth, social inclusiveness, poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and peace and security.

57. In employing such an approach, one option would be to create an umbrella cross-cutting goal on natural resources, to be included as a sustainable development goal and to be integrated across the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. It is important to emphasize that the integration of natural resources, including forests, into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 is of significant importance, as it will help countries to address goals in an integrated manner. The post-2015 and United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development processes may require the full integration of an umbrella cross-cutting goal on natural resources to highlight the full value of natural resources not only for the environment, but also for economic growth and social development. Under such an umbrella goal, various existing targets on natural resources set out in the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and meetings, including the global objectives on forests with a new timeline, as well as new proposed goals and targets relating to other natural resources, such as energy, land and biodiversity, could be included, subject to agreement among countries. The targets and indicators under such an umbrella goal on natural resources should be mutually supportive, consistent and complementary, so that they cover all of the critical components of the challenges to sustainable development, and each of its three pillars, as well as their integration.

58. If an umbrella goal on natural resources could be incorporated into the post-2015 United Nations development agenda by including it among other sustainable development goals, it would reinforce the comprehensive approach of the Forum and assist the Forum in taking its decision in 2015 on the future of the international arrangement on forests.

59. Member States are extensively engaged in addressing the issues related to this process and will soon discuss the substantive issues concerning sustainable development goals and the high-level political forum. In accordance with the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the decisions regarding the format and organizational aspects of the forum are expected to be taken during the upcoming session of the General Assembly, with the aim of holding the first session of the forum at the beginning of the sixty-eighth session of the Assembly, in September 2013. In addition, the open working group is requested to submit a proposal on global sustainable development goals to be agreed upon by the Assembly. It will submit a report to the Assembly at its sixty-eighth session containing a proposal for sustainable development goals for consideration and appropriate action.

60. There are several ways in which the United Nations Forum on Forests should influence the above-mentioned processes. Member States, the Bureau, the Forum

secretariat, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, major groups and regional processes are the key and influential stakeholders that can help to articulate key points on these issues to country representatives in the consultations, the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and the Secretary-General. It should be noted that the Forum secretariat has already been designated by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to take the lead in developing an outline for the integration of natural resources into the post-2015 United Nations development agenda and a goal on natural resources, and to share it with the Partnership for its consideration at its next meeting. The Forum may wish to consider specific actions in this regard to be taken by the Forum's stakeholders during the intersessional period leading up to the eleventh session of the Forum.

VI. Conclusions

61. The period between 2013 and 2015 will shape the future of the global development agenda and related institutional modalities as the international community is engaged in operationalizing the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and designing the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. This period will also be decisive for the future of the international arrangement on forests, because the Forum should take a decision on this matter at its eleventh session. These major issues are closely interlinked and will have an impact on each other. Substantive preparatory work on the international arrangement on forests and a comprehensive assessment of the implications of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 United Nations development agenda are elements necessary to enable the Forum at its eleventh session to fulfil its mandate to review the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests and decide on the future global policy architecture on forests.

VII. Recommendations

62. In order to be able to take a constructive consensual decision at its eleventh session, in 2015, on the future international arrangement on forests in line with major global developments, the United Nations Forum on Forests may wish to:

(a) Decide to establish an ad hoc expert group to review various aspects, components and options for the future international arrangement on forests, with a view to, inter alia, making proposals to the Forum at its eleventh session;

(b) Decide that the ad hoc expert group should take fully into account the interconnections and implications of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the international arrangement on forests;

(c) Also decide that the ad hoc expert group should meet once during the intersessional period between the tenth and eleventh sessions of the Forum;

(d) Invite countries, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and relevant regional organizations and processes to actively participate in the intersessional activities on the future options for the international arrangement on forests;

(e) Invite the country representatives participating in the consultations on the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 United Nations development agenda to include, among the sustainable development goals, a cross-cutting goal on natural resources that includes forests as well as to integrate natural resources into all of the goals;

(f) Invite members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to carry out analytical work on "natural capital accounting";

(g) Request the Secretary-General to include recommendations on the future international arrangement on forests in his report on the main theme of the eleventh session of the Forum;

(h) Invite countries to provide support to the Forum Trust Fund in order to ensure the full participation of all stakeholders in the preparatory process and to enable the secretariat to carry out the intersessional activities and relevant analytical work and surveys in preparation for the meetings of the ad hoc expert group and the eleventh session.